Organized Retail Theft: A Booming "Industry"

These thieves waltz into a department store and steal twenty pairs of pants, or fill up a cart with expensive medicines, DVDs, baby formula, or other high-cost items, then walk right out the door without paying for any of it - slipping past security or using other deceptive techniques.   It's called organized retail theft, and it's a $30 billion to $37 billion a year crime problem, according to industry estimates. "The overall price tag is more than burglary, larceny, robbery, and auto theft combined," says Supervisory Special Agent Brian J. Nadeau, program manager of the Organized Retail Theft Program at FBI Headquarters. "These aren't shoplifters taking a pack of gum. These are professional thieves. This is their day job."
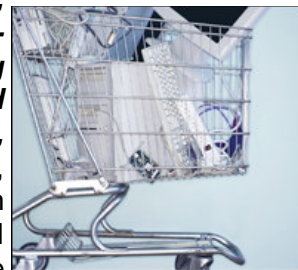
These thieves—called **"boosters"** —can make good money for their efforts, Nadeau said. They typically are paid 30 cents on the dollar for stolen goods. In some cases, they haul off $5,000 to $10,000 worth of merchandise each time they leave a store. The same team might hit several stores in a day and the same store once a month. A really good professional thief can make between $100,000 and $200,000 a year.

Boosters waste no time. They get in and out of stores quickly because they know what they want. In fact, they're often given a shopping list by their "fences"—people who buy their goods. Then, they get out of Dodge fast. "They can be in the next jurisdiction or across state lines by the time local police arrive to take a report," Nadeau says.

More on fences. Street-level fences typically buy from a couple different boosters, pay in cash or drugs, and sell the merchandise in their own discount stores, at flea markets, or through online auctions. Some sell to higher-level fences who repackage—or scrub—the goods and pawn them off on retailers at prices that undercut legitimate distributors. Ironically, some stolen merchandise can actually make its way back on to the shelves of the chain store where it was stolen, Nadeau says.

Besides the huge financial toll retail theft takes on the industry—which leads to higher consumer prices—there are safety issues, too. Some stolen products—including baby formula and medicine—have expiration dates that are altered before being resold. Some products may be stored incorrectly and go bad. In some cases, boosters approached in the store may even turn violent.

Tackling the problem. The FBI has worked retail theft issues for years, in concert with industry and law enforcement partners. Now, a groundbreaking new database will help our collective efforts.   The database—called the Law Enforcement Retail Partnership Network, or LERPNet—is available to participating retailers and law enforcement personnel through a secure Internet portal. It was developed in partnership with the Retail Industry Leaders Association and the National Retail Federation. To date, more than 32 retailers representing 46,000 stores have signed on.   The network will provide a uniform way of tracking retail theft, improve information sharing, and help tie rings to multiple crimes. It will also enable retailers and law enforcement personnel to see if there are patterns in geographic areas and in types of merchandise taken, or even if boosters prefer to hit at a particular time of day. "Organized retail theft is a huge problem. Thankfully, we've got a huge network of partners to tackle it together," Nadeau says.

Information provided by the Federal Bureau of Investigation

Additional information is available at: **The National Retail Federation**, www.nrf.com, **The Retail Industry Leaders Association**, www.retail-leaders.org, or **The Law Enforcement Retail Partnership Network** at www.lerpnet.com.

Crimes Occurring on Business Property
For the Month of April 2008

COMMERCIAL ROBBERY:　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　*LOSS*

17900 block 108th Ave SE 1:36 a.m.	The employee was cleaning outside the business when he noticed the suspect hiding behind the ice machine. The employee went back into the business and was followed by the suspect, who displayed a gun and demanded he open the cash register. The crime was captured by surveillance cameras, and latent fingerprints were lifted from the scene. A K9 track for the suspect was unsuccessful. *Crime Prevention Tips: Only the minimum amount of cash necessary to conduct business should be left in the cash register; this will decrease the loss to the business and also reduce the likelihood of the robber returning (a "good haul" the first time is an incentive to return.) Potential "hiding places" near business entries should be eliminated. Signs and advertisements should be removed from the windows so that employees can observe suspicious activity occurring outside.*	$300

COMMERCIAL BURGLARY:　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　*LOSS*

1800 block Index Ave NE	Officers responded to a report of cash disappearing from the business overnight. There was no sign of forced entry to the business. Cash was removed from an unlocked drawer, although the suspect left behind money in the register drawer. It is company policy keep a set of keys to the business in a nearby locked structure. The keys were still in place, but any employee of the company from any of the company's locations would have a key that would unlock the structure. The officer inspected the structure key, which was a common key that could easily have been duplicated. A possible suspect is an employee of a nearby location of the same business, who sometimes worked at this site and recently quit. Like all employees, he would have had a key to the structure where the "spare" business keys were kept. *Crime Prevention Tips: Cash left on the premises after hours should be secured in a locked safe that is bolted down. Background checks should be conducted on all employees, and business keys should be accessible only to select employees. Locks should be re-keyed when an employee is terminated or has left under negative circumstances.*	$586
300 block Renton Ave S	Entry to the business was made by removing a mesh screen from a window opening. The alarm was tripped several times inside multiple rooms of the business. It is unknown if anything is missing from the business. *Crime Prevention Tip: Repairs to damaged windows and doors should be completed as soon as possible; they are weak points that can be exploited by criminals.*	unknown
1400 block Monster Rd SW	Two digital cameras were stolen from the business. Entry was gained by removing the screen from a window that was left open. The alarm company had contacted an employee regarding an alarm trip a few days prior, but the employee cancelled the alarm before it could be dispatched to police. There is no suspect information. *Crime Prevention Tip: Unattended windows and doors should be secured.*	$200
300 block Monroe Ave NE	The manager reported someone entered a small building on the business lot, damaged a glass case, and removed property. The building was locked, but has an access code that is simple, and could easily be opened. There is no suspect information. *Crime Prevention Tip: Access codes should be complex and difficult to guess. Knowledge of the code should be limited to select employees only.*	unknown
800 block S 36th Pl	Burglary to construction site. Suspect/s attempted entry to three structures by prying locks and attempting to force the doors open. Entry was not gained to two of the structures; the suspect damaged the rear door of the third structure prior to discovering the front door was unlocked. Nothing was reported missing from the site, but approximately $2,000 in damage was committed. *Crime Prevention Tips: All doors and windows should be checked at the end of the workday to ensure they are locked. Possible preventative measures that could be taken include installing alarms on each structure, securing the site with fencing, and hiring security to patrol the construction site.*	none

Crimes Occurring on Business Property
For the Month of April 2008 (Continued)

1700 block NE 48th St	An employee reports $4,000 worth of prescription medication samples were stolen from a storage facility. Entry was gained by prying the door. The employee advised that this is not the first issue she has had with theft from this location. *Crime Prevention Tip: A "good haul" the first time is an incentive to return; thieves have scored twice at this location, and are likely to return. If the door cannot be adequately secured against forced entry, consider relocating your property to a different storage location.*	$4,000
100 block S Grady Way	Arriving at work, the employee found the cash box on the floor and a file cabinet pried open. There was no sign of forced entry to the office and nothing else appeared to be missing, although a computer was moved. Elsewhere in the building a ceiling-mounted projector had been unscrewed from the post and was hanging down as if someone may have tried to remove it. *Crime Prevention Tips Cash left on-site should be stored in a locked safe that is bolted down. Key control is imperative; only trusted employees should have keys to the business. Background checks should be conducted on employees as well as any outside contractors the business uses, such as cleaning and maintenance staff.*	$75

Auto Thefts: There were 42 cars reported stolen in Renton during the month of April 2008.

Auto Recoveries: Twenty-six vehicles that were stolen outside the City were recovered in Renton during April 2008.

OTHER CRIMES OF INTEREST OCCURRING ON BUSINESS PROPERTY

600 block West Perimeter Rd	Officers responded to a report of suspicious activity. A maintenance worker found a round device, covered in duct tape with wires sticking out both ends, in a flowerbed. Another employee advised that the device had been found the day prior, by someone else, who came in to tell the manager about it. The manager was not there and that employee forgot about the device until it was found by maintenance the next day. The Port of Seattle Bomb Unit was called out, took an x-ray of the device, and determined it was not explosive. *Crime Prevention Tip: Take all potential threats seriously, and immediately call 9-1-1 for police assistance.*
1100 block Bronson Way N	Business owner reports he was contacted by a bank regarding a subject who was attempting to cash a business check for $943. The business owner did not know the subject and had not issued checks to her. Upon contacting his bank, he learned that two other checks payable to the subject had cleared his account. The subject was contacted by police. *Crime Prevention Tip: Check financial accounts regularly, and report suspicious activity to your financial institution (and also to police when appropriate).*
1000 block S 2nd St	The business had received a bulletin about a shoplifter and vehicle that had stolen from another store location the day prior. The suspect was inside the store and the vehicle outside. The suspect left in the vehicle and was stopped by police. The driver was arrested for a suspended license. A search of the vehicle located several packages of unopened merchandise identical to the items stolen from the other store location the day prior. *Crime Prevention Comment: GREAT information sharing between store locations, and kudos to the alert employee who recognized the suspect and vehicle!*
2800 block NE Sunset Blvd	An employee called to report two unwanted subjects inside the business, one of whom had previously been formally trespassed by an officer. This subject was arrested for Criminal Trespass, and the other subject was given a formal trespass warning stating if he returned to the business he could be charged with Trespass. *Crime Prevention Tip: Subjects must be given a formal trespass warning by a police officer. If the subject returns following the warning, he/she is subject to arrest and prosecution.*
South Renton	The business answering service received a call that included threats to shoot an employee. The suspect has left in excess of 300 harassing phone messages in the past year. *Crime Prevention Tip: Harassment and threats should be reported immediately to police, so they are aware of the problem and can provide additional patrol emphasis. Court orders restricting phone calls and contacts can be obtained through the court system.*

RENTON POLICE DEPARTMENT

Terri Vickers / Crime Prevention Unit
1055 S Grady Way
Renton, WA 98057
Phone: (425) 430-7520
Fax: (425) 430-7505
E-mail the Editor at: tvickers@ci.renton.wa.us

Make a Police Report via the Internet!

Renton's online reporting system allows you to make certain non-emergency police reports via the internet. Submit the report at your convenience, and print a copy for your records. Incident types available for online reporting include:

- Abandoned vehicles
- Harassing phone calls
- Identity theft
- Lost property
- Non-injury hit & run accident
- Theft (less than $1,500)
- Retail theft (less than $1,500)
- Vandalism (less than $1,500)

All cases filed online will be reviewed. Once the report has been reviewed, a Renton case number and a copy of the report will be emailed to you. Reports that do not meet online reporting criteria will be rejected. Filing a false police report is a crime. For additional information and to make an online report, go to www.ci.renton.wa.us.

CITY HALL PHONE NUMBERS

Information Desk	430-6400
Economic Development	430-6575
Fire Prevention	430-7000
Business Watch	430-7520
Block Watch	430-7521
Human Services	430-6650
City Clerk	430-6510
Utility Systems	430-7234
Police Department	430-7500
Code Enforcement	430-7269